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[Putin, Xi and Kim Are United. Can the West Be?](#)

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Headlines in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* on September 4 declared, "[Europe Aims to Show It Is Ready to Secure Postwar Ukraine](#)" and "[Encouraged by Trump, Europeans plan to send troops to secure postwar Ukraine](#)". At the same moment, reports suggested Vladimir Putin might meet Volodymyr Zelensky -- though only in Moscow, if at all. None of this can happen fast enough, given President Trump's repeated refrain that "the killing must stop". In Washington and in Europe alike, the broad public expectation is for tangible movement, not more rhetoric.

Putin's [recent visit](#) with Xi Jinping in Beijing -- alongside Kim Jong-Un -- made plain the direction they intend to push the world. It should also remind Trump which side he must choose in an emerging order. The trip underscored the deepening bond between Moscow and Beijing, a partnership long in the making and now unmistakable. For the White House, the message is simple: Western unity cannot wait. The clearest way to show that unity is to take a firm, public stance on the war in Ukraine. Trump has urged greater European action, and that is beginning to take shape -- but not yet at the necessary scale.

With France and the United Kingdom moving to lead a new "[coalition of the willing](#)", Europe appears more aligned than it has in years. That leadership matters. But unity alone will not end this war. To bring Russia to the table, Ukraine's battlefield position must be strengthened -- and that requires both European resolve and American commitment. Without credible power behind diplomacy, cease-fire talk is little more than choreography.

Trump holds the key. He has delayed decisions on sanctions and weapons, promising answers in "two or three weeks", but hesitation only benefits the Kremlin. Europe needs clear guarantees that Washington will stand firm and stay engaged. Ambiguity may soothe domestic politics; it does not deter an adversary who believes time is on his side.

Moscow, meanwhile, is signaling little appetite for compromise. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov [cast doubt](#) on the feasibility of a peace process in an interview with NBC's *Meet the Press*, insisting that no talks were on the calendar and that core disputes over territory and security guarantees for Ukraine remain unresolved. It was a reminder that Russia has scant incentive to negotiate seriously unless its battlefield position erodes. Absent pressure, stalemate becomes strategy.

At a recent Paris meeting of the coalition, joined by Trump's peace envoy, Steve Witkoff, French officials [stressed](#) that Europe intends to provide Ukraine with real security guarantees after any potential cease-fire. They also conceded that the United States is indispensable. Without Washington's backing, no plan will carry the credibility needed to deter Moscow from trying again. Europe can frame the architecture, but only America can anchor it.

Traditional frameworks offer limited hope. NATO is constrained by Turkey's balancing act with Russia. Inside the EU, [resistance](#) from Hungary and Slovakia makes binding action elusive. That is why the Paris-and-London coalition matters. Yet unless Washington throws its weight behind it, the project risks being more statement than strategy. Coalitions convey intent; American endorsement converts intent into consequence.

If Washington puts actions behind its words, the payoff could be significant. Should Trump choose to act, he could not only help end the war but also advance his long-standing quest for a Nobel Peace Prize. Even Hillary Clinton floated the idea in a [recent interview](#) with NBC News. After arguing that the United States cannot accept Ukraine ceding any territory to Russia, she added, "If we could pull that off, if President Trump were the architect of that, I'd nominate him for a Nobel Peace Prize, because my goal here is to not allow capitulation to Putin, aided and abetted by the United States. I think that's a terrible, terrible precedent."

Peace will come only if a credible agreement can be brokered -- and that will not happen [without decisive changes](#) on the ground. Battlefield realities shape the positions of both Ukraine and Russia. To shift that balance, sanctions must tighten, and military aid must continue. Europe has rebuilt a coalition of the willing; what it needs now is the final push across the line. That push lies in Trump's hands. Delivering it would demonstrate not only resolve but also the capacity to shape events rather than be shaped by them.

If he declines to act, Congress can still push through tougher sanctions and increased military support. But Trump has the chance to lead rather than follow. The opportunity is his if he chooses to seize it.

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